

March 2, 2010

Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs Public Hearing Testimony

Julie Peters, Executive Director, Brain Injury Association of CT

Chairpersons Maynard and Graziani and Members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Julie Peters and I am the Executive Director of the Brain Injury Association of Connecticut. I am here today representing the Brain Injury Association of Connecticut in support of **HB 5353 An Act Establishing a Task Force on Traumatic Brain Injury**. We believe the establishment of a task force is a critical first step in assuring that those who sustain a concussion, whether as a member of the military or as a civilian, have access to all of the appropriate treatment and services necessary to lead a full life.

Each year, more than 1.4 million Americans will sustain a brain injury. In Connecticut alone, the average is 22 people every day, 8,000 every year. Both nationwide and in Connecticut, brain injury disables more people each year than spinal cord injury, multiple sclerosis, HIV/AIDS and breast cancer combined – in fact, **six times more people**. This public health concern ranks as the leading cause of death and disability in children and young adults. For survivors and families, brain injury is a life-altering experience and the costs to both caregivers and the State is staggering and continues to increase.

As many of you know, traumatic brain injury is the *signature injury* of this war. Recent data indicates that the incidence of TBI among wounded service members is as high as 22%. The State of CT Department of Veterans Affairs published the first Complete Needs Assessment Study on Returning Afghanistan and Iraq Veterans where initial findings indicated 1 in 5 Veterans could be in need of services to address residual effects from a brain injury. This rate suggests TBI will be a significant problem for Veterans returning to CT and highlights the vital need for an increase in resources. Many soldiers return to CT and find that, as in the civilian population, the services necessary to lead an independent and fulfilling life after a brain injury are either not available to them or do not exist.

Currently, access to full community based services is only available for 369 individuals who meet the strict income guidelines and who would otherwise be forced to be institutionalized. Even with the strict requirements, the waiting list for community-based program is over 2 years long. Moreover, this program does nothing to address the needs of those whose injury may not be as dramatic, but for whom activities of daily living can be dramatically impacted.

During the time it takes to hold this hearing, more than 10 people in Connecticut are likely to have sustained a head injury. It can happen to anyone driving home today - young or old, rich or poor, male or female. **Everyone** deserves the right to live safely in their own community.

We believe that this task force, if appropriately advised by those in our community with a complete understanding of this issue, can take Connecticut to the first step in addressing the needs of ALL residents with brain injuries in our state. Composition of this Task Force should include organizations and individuals in Connecticut who are professionally well versed in serving this unique population of Connecticut residents.

Thank you.